

18 December 2008

Dear Keith,

There may be a point to be made out of the fact that in this letter the Dept of Children, Schools and Families says in respect of the Saint Christopher Centre log cabin at Dale Farm funded by Essex County Council the Department may recover the market value of this asset, purchased with grant funds, when the asset is disposed of (ie demolished during the eviction operation by Constant & Co as agents of Basildon District Council).

Keith Lomax,

I visited Dale Farm on 16 September as part of an on-going exploration of new opportunities for learning there. My visit included time in the Saint Christopher Centre, and a walk around Dale Farm with Grattan Puxon, speaking to a broad range of people and getting a general impression of the community's unique context and culture.

As a professor of with chairs in both New Media Environments and New Learning environments, with a host of ground breaking learning projects worldwide, and advising a number of governments including the UK's about 21st century learning, I can confirm that Dale Farm offers a unique opportunity to build and evidence the effectiveness of a learning community quite literally picking itself up by its bootstraps and leaping forward in terms of literacy, numberacy and much more beside. There was a clear sense of community and indeed collegiality throughout the place and the Saint Christopher Centre provides, with the technology I will be sourcing for it, a perfect setting for a community learning project that will teach the nation much about inclusion, lifelong learning and the way that substantial learning progress can evolve, but not erase, unique and culturally diverse communities.

No doubt planners will worry that there is nowhere else like Dale Farm, but that uniqueness offers an opportunity to learn so much that will be of far wider value to the nation. In 2006 the DfES were kind enough to describe me as:

"the most influential academic of recent years in the field of technology and education"

and that same year Microsoft described me as:

"Europe's leading online education expert"

It is my intention to focus that influence and expertise on a unique and extraordinary learning project, for and by the residents of Dale Farm, using the Saint Christopher Centre as a catalyst. I do very much hope that enough time will be available for this key national learning project to evidence just what is possible when a whole community embraces learning from, and for, itself.

Stephen
Professor Stephen Heppell

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